

The Direct and Indirect Effects of Buddhism on Fertility Rates in General and in Specific Socioeconomic Circumstances of Women

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Abstract : Our worldwide aging society, especially in developed countries, including members of EU, raise sophisticated sociological and economic issues and challenges to be met. As declining fertility has outstanding influence underlying this trend, numerous studies have attempted to identify, describe, measure and interpret contributing factors of the fertility rate, out of which relatively few revealed the impact of religion. Identified, examined and influential factors affecting birth rate as stated by the present scientific publications are more than a dozen out of which religious beliefs, traditions, and cultural norms were examined first with a special focus on abortion and forms of birth control. Nevertheless, connected to religion, not only these topics are crucial regarding fertility, but many others as well. Among many religious guidelines, we can separate two major categories: direct and indirect. The aim of this research was to understand what are the most crucial identified (family values, gender related behaviors, religious sentiments) and not yet identified most influential contributing religious factors. Above identifying these direct or indirect factors, it is also important to understand to what extent and how do they influence fertility, which requires a wider (inter-discipline) perspective. As proved by previous studies religion has also an influential role on health, mental state, well-being, working activity and many other components that are also related to fertility rates. All these components are inter-related. Hence direct and indirect religious effects can only be well understood if we figure out all necessary fields and their interaction. With the help of semi-structured opened interviews taking place in different countries, it was showed that indeed Buddhism has significant direct and indirect effect on fertility. Hence the initial hypothesis was proved. However, the interviews showed an overall positive effect; the results could only serve for a general understanding of how Buddhism affects fertility. Evolution of Buddhism's direct and indirect influence may vary in different nations and circumstances according to their specific environmental attributes. According to the local patterns, with special regard to women's position and role in the society, outstandingly indirect influences could show diversifications. So it is advisory to investigate more for a deeper and clearer understanding of how Buddhism function in different socioeconomic circumstances. For this purpose, a specific and detailed analysis was developed from recent related researches about women's position (including family roles and economic activity) in Hungary with the intention to be able to have a complex vision of crucial socioeconomic factors influencing fertility. Further interviews and investigations are to be done in order to show a complex vision of Buddhism's direct and indirect effect on fertility in Hungary to be able to support recommendations and policies pointing to higher fertility rates in the field of social policies. The present research could serve as a general starting point or a common basis for further specific national investigations.

Keywords : Buddhism, children, fertility, gender roles, religion, women

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